

Transatlantic Relations in 2018

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Related Authors

- [Vincent L. Morelli](#)
 - [Kristin Archick](#)
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Vincent L. Morelli, Section Research Manager (vmorelli@crs.loc.gov, 7-8051)
Kristin Archick, Specialist in European Affairs (karchick@crs.loc.gov, 7-2668)

As the second year of the Trump Administration begins, a degree of uncertainty lingers over transatlantic relations. The U.S.-European partnership could face challenges in 2018. Following the election of President Trump, numerous European officials and analysts [expressed concern](#) about the future trajectory of U.S.-European relations, particularly the U.S. commitment to NATO, the European Union (EU), and the multilateral trading system. Although the Trump Administration has not altered or withdrawn from the fundamental aspects of the transatlantic relationship, many European leaders appear uneasy with key parts of the Trump Administration's "America First" foreign policy and some question whether the United States will remain a [reliable partner](#) in 2018.

Many European policymakers harbor concerns about Trump Administration policies on a range of international challenges, from relations with Russia, China, and the Middle East to issues such as global migration, the role of multilateral organizations, and free trade. Some European officials also are wary about the Administration's commitment to the 2015 multilateral [nuclear deal with Iran](#) and have urged the United States to continue to support the deal. U.S. decisions to [withdraw from the Paris climate agreement](#) and to [recognize Jerusalem](#) as the capital of Israel have become irritants in the relationship.

Some Europeans consider President Trump to be ambivalent about the EU and the U.S. security umbrella for Europe. The Trump Administration's views on a proposed U.S.-EU free-trade agreement (the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, or T-TIP) [remain](#)

[unclear](#), and the Administration has yet to nominate a U.S. ambassador to the EU. The Trump Administration continues to urge NATO allies to shoulder more of the burden for European security and increase their defense spending. Others note, however, that President Trump has [reaffirmed the U.S. commitment to NATO's "Article 5" mutual defense clause](#) and the Administration's [FY2018 budget proposal requested a 40% increase in funding for the U.S. European Reassurance Initiative](#) (since renamed the European Deterrence Initiative, or EDI), which seeks to strengthen the U.S. military presence in Central and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, the EU faces several internal challenges, including negotiating the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU ("Brexit"), addressing rule-of-law concerns in Poland and Hungary, and managing the migration and Catalan crises. Such issues are consuming a good deal of the EU's attention and could limit its ability to work with the United States on shared foreign-policy concerns.

Despite the potential challenges to transatlantic relations in 2018, most European governments view close political and economic ties with the United States as a cornerstone of their foreign and security policies. Many European policymakers hope to preserve the existing strong partnership with the United States on issues such as cooperative approaches to decisionmaking, support for multilateral institutions, security, countering terrorism, promoting cybersecurity, and resolving the Ukraine crisis.

Europe and the National Security Strategy (NSS)

Some analysts suggest that the Trump Administration's new [National Security Strategy](#) indicates an enduring U.S. commitment to transatlantic relations and U.S.-European cooperation. The NSS reiterates the long-standing U.S. view that "the United States is safer when Europe is prosperous and stable, and can help defend our shared interests and ideals." The NSS reaffirms the U.S. commitment to Article 5 and restates the Administration's view that NATO "will become stronger when all members assume greater responsibility for and pay their fair share." The NSS also highlights security, energy, Russia, and even China's growing economic interest in Europe as common challenges facing both sides of the Atlantic.

Other experts note that the strategy's broad emphasis on global competition and sovereignty [may generate unease in Europe](#) if viewed as an indication that the United States is turning away from multilateral institutions and international cooperation. The strategy's only reference to the EU is to assert that the United States will work with it "to ensure fair and reciprocal trade practices and eliminate barriers to trade." Moreover, the NSS does not devote much attention to other important European concerns, such as climate change, the environment, or human rights.

Future Prospects and Congressional Interests

The prospect of a major shift in U.S. policy toward Europe by the Trump Administration was and remains an unsettling development for many on both sides of the Atlantic. For decades, successive U.S. Administrations and Members of Congress have supported NATO and the European integration project as ways to help prevent another catastrophic war in Europe and to foster democratic allies and strong trading partners.

Congress has weighed in on the importance of maintaining close relations with Europe and working together to manage common challenges. Resolutions were passed in both the [House](#) and [Senate](#) in 2017 in support of NATO and Article 5. The Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act of 2017 (Title II, [P.L. 115-44](#)) reiterated U.S. support for Ukraine and codified U.S. sanctions on Russia; the act also included language to take EU concerns into account should the United States seek to impose new sanctions on Russia. Numerous delegations of House and Senate Members traveling to Europe, and the reestablishment of the EU Caucus in the House, also were seen as efforts to reiterate U.S. support for close transatlantic ties. Europeans likely will look to early 2018, through venues such as the Munich Security Conference, the Brussels Forum, and NATO's spring summit, for additional signs that the Administration and Congress remain supportive of a strong transatlantic partnership.

At the same time, some European leaders and commentators will continue to suggest that Europe must be better prepared to address challenges on its own in the years ahead. In May 2017, German Chancellor Angela Merkel asserted that [the days when Europe could depend on others were "over"](#) to some extent, a comment widely interpreted as referring to the United States. The EU has begun putting new emphasis on enhancing [European defense cooperation](#) and concluding [trade agreements with other countries and regions](#), including Canada, Japan, and Latin America. Some observers view these efforts to [reduce European dependence on the United States](#) as a worrying sign of a [transatlantic drift](#). In 2018, Congress may consider the implications of such possible developments for the U.S. role in NATO and U.S.-European relations in the longer term.